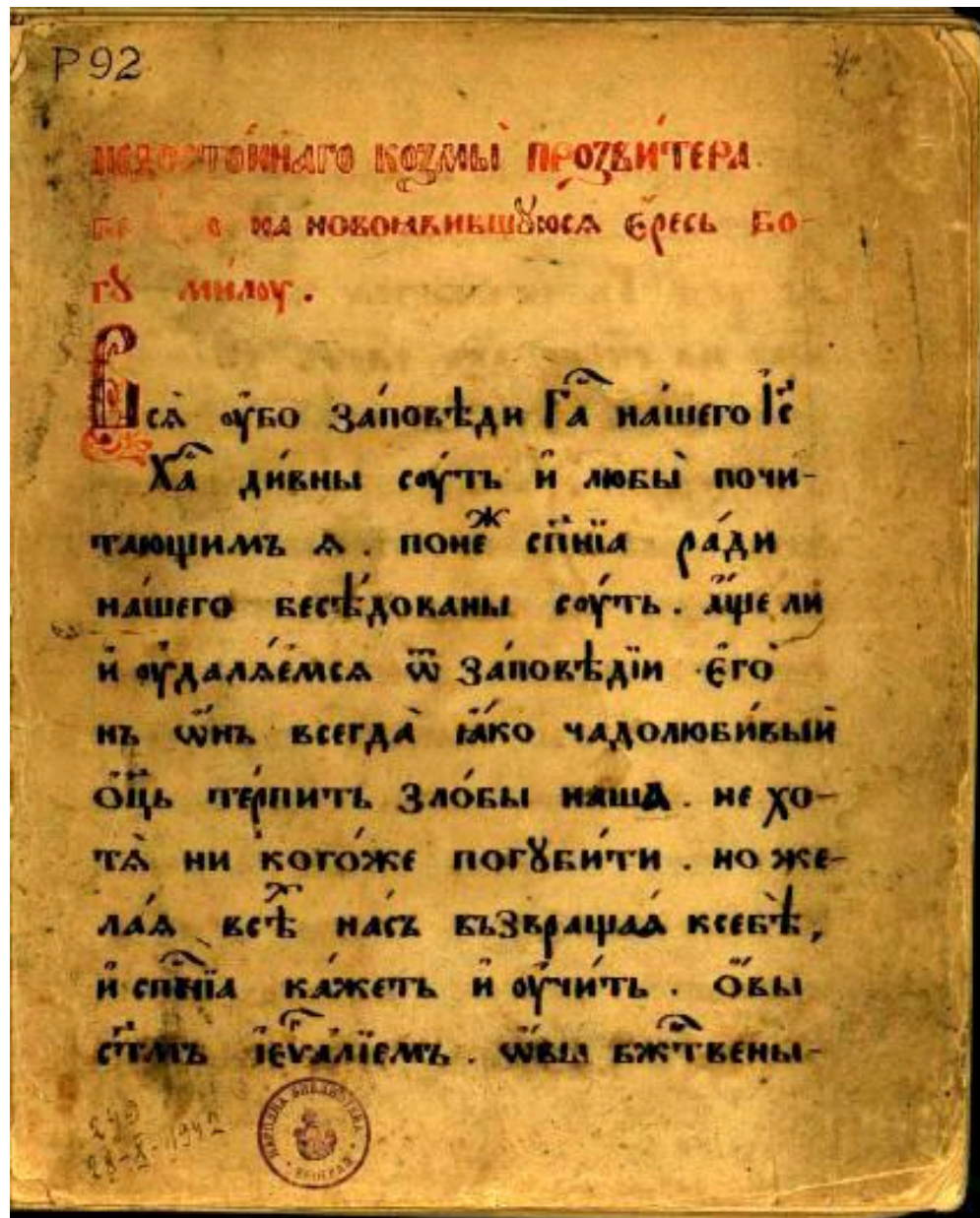


Homily of the Unworthy Presbyter Cosmas Against the Newly-Appeared Bogomil Heresy (10th century)



A page from Cosmas the Priest's Sermon Against the Heretics

The discourse of the priest Cosmas has been conventionally dated to the late tenth century, after the death of Tsar Peter (927-69), who is referred to as a 'good Christian' - a normal Slav formula for the dead — but to whose canonization in 972 no allusion is made. On this dating Cosmas gives the Bulgarian account of those heretics whose views are condemned in the letter of the patriarch Theophylact [10]. He is writing half a century before the account of Bogomil beliefs given by Euthymius of the Periblepton [19] and a century before the Greek letter of the patriarch Cosmas, on which the Bulgarian Synodikon of Tsar Boril was based [21]. Some Bulgarian scholars have argued against this dating; their views are conveniently summarized in Dando's article, 'Peut-on avancer de 240 ans la date de composition du traité de Cosmas le prêtre contre les Bogomiles?' For arguments for accepting the conventional dating, see our Introduction, p. 27. This translation is based on the French translation of Puech and Vaillant (Paris, 1945), but it has been amended by Yuri Stoyanov, who has collated it with the new critical edition of the Old Slavonic text of O. Bégunov, which is based on many additional manuscripts and on citations in later works, and therefore contains a large number of variants. No modern translation exists of this new edition of the text.



Conversion of a Heretic Priest, a miniature concerning the Bogomils.

1. All the commandments of Our Lord Jesus Christ are wonderful and dear to those who read them since they were spoken for our salvation. Even if we are far from his commands, like a loving father, He bears with our wickedness; He does not will the loss of any but desires to bring us all back to Himself and to save us: He admonishes and teaches us, some by the holy Gospels, others by inspired teachers, so that we may not fall into the pit of heresy... Our enemy, the devil, knows this, and he has never ceased to lead mankind astray; beginning with Adam, the first man, until today, he has not ceased to try to entice all men from the faith so that a large number of men might be with him in torment; his deceptions have led some to worship idols, others to kill their brothers, yet others to commit fornication and other sins. But since he saw that all these sins could not be compared with heresy, he entered first Arius,¹ who set himself to blaspheme the son of God, claiming that he is not equal to God, but is like an angel, subordinate to God, forgetting the word of Christ, 'I and the Father are one' [John 10.30]: he also entered Sabellius, who undertook to unite the divine persons into one, saying that what suffered in body on the cross was at the same time Christ and the divinity of the Holy Trinity; while Macedonius used to blaspheme the Holy Spirit, claiming that he is inferior to the Father and the Son, not equal in divinity. Their teachings were anathematized by the holy fathers at the council of Nicaea: they rooted them out of Christianity like the tares out of the field, with the help of God and the emperor Constantine. Later, there were various heresies in various places, not about the Holy Trinity but about divine creation; some devised one error and some another, but the teachings of the holy apostles and the fathers banished them from everywhere.

This, then, is what happened in the land of Bulgaria. In the reign of the good Christian Tsar Peter² there was a priest called Bogomil, 'worthy of God's compassion,'³ but in reality Bogunemil, 'unworthy of God's compassion,' who started for the first time to preach heresy in the country of Bulgaria. Later, we shall expose his errors...

Indeed, externally, the heretics appear as sheep: they are gentle, humble and quiet. They seem pale from their hypocritical fasts, they do not utter vain words, they do not laugh out loud, they do not show curiosity, they take care not to be noticeable, and they do everything externally so that they may not be told apart from orthodox Christians. Inside, they are ravening wolves, as the Lord said [Matt. 7.15]. People who see this great humility of theirs, who think that they are good Christians⁴ and able to direct them to salvation, approach them and take their advice about their souls' salvation: while they, like a wolf about to snatch away a lamb, at first pretend to sigh, and answer humbly. They pass themselves off as knowing in advance what happens in heaven,⁵ and when they see anyone simple and ignorant there, they sow the tares of their doctrines and blaspheme the traditional teaching of the Holy Church, as I will show in what follows.

As for you, faithful army of Christ, let none of you be their friend; you would be enemies of Christ. Apply yourselves to reading holy scripture so that you may not go to endless torment...

To return to our subject. Scripture says, ‘As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him, saying “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” The Lord answered them, “Take heed, for many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray.” But, he added, “You be on your guard so that no one leads you astray” [Matt. 24.3-5]. “You will recognize them by their fruits; a good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor a bad tree good fruit. Men do not gather grapes from thorns, nor harvest figs from thistles” [Matt. 7.16, 18]. All the same, you ought to recognize these men from their fruits, that is, their hypocrisy, pride, and blasphemies, and when you have recognized them, avoid them, lest you share their condemnation. If a man who allies himself to the enemies of an earthly king does not even deserve to live but is put to death along with them, how much more those who are the enemies of the heavenly king; they will perish in the everlasting fire, as it is said, ‘Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire’ [Matt. 3.10]. What do the heretics say? ‘We pray to God more than you do, we keep vigils⁶ and prayers, we do not live in laziness as you do.’ Alas, words like those of the proud Pharisee who boasted of himself, saying, ‘I am not like other men, extortioners, criminals, adulterers’ [Luke 18.11]. We shall answer them, ‘What are you boasting of, you arrogant heretics? By this reckoning, the devil does not sleep either; he does not taste food...’. ‘But,’ they say to us, ‘we call on God in our prayers.’ We shall answer them, ‘Do you hear demons calling out to the Lord, “What have you to do with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?”’ [Matt. 8.29]. As for us, let us leave them to go their own way to perdition; you can correct an animal more quickly than a heretic. The pig turns from the pearl to gather excrement; similarly, heretics stuff themselves with their filth and distance themselves from divine teaching. Just as when you shoot arrows at marble, you do not pierce it, but the arrow, glancing off, is likely to hit someone behind you similarly, when you try to instruct a heretic, you should not consider merely that you will not succeed in instructing him, but that you might even corrupt someone whose spirit is weak.

What shall we compare them to, what shall we liken them to? They are worse than deaf-blind idols, for idols are made of wood and stone, and of their nature neither hear nor see, whereas heretics have human thoughts; they have voluntarily made themselves stone so that they may not recognize the teaching of truth. Shall I compare them to demons? They are worse than the demons themselves, for the demons are afraid of the cross of Christ, while the heretics chop up crosses and make tools of them.⁷ The demons are afraid of the image of the Lord painted on a wooden panel, but the heretics do not venerate icons but call them idols.⁸ The demons are afraid of the relics⁹ of God's just; they dare not approach the reliquaries where lies the priceless treasure given to Christians to save them from every danger, while heretics deride them and laugh at us when they see us prostrating ourselves in front of them and asking for their help, forgetting that the Lord said, ‘He who believes in me will do the works that I do, and greater works than these will He do’ [John 14.21]. At the same time as they refuse to give glory to the saints, they insult the miracles of God, such as are done by the relics of the saints through the power of the Holy Spirit, and say, “The miracles did not take place according to the will of God,

but it was the devil who did them to trick mankind'; they utter still more nonsense on this subject, wagging their heads like the Jews when they crucified Christ.

O patient God, how long will you watch the human race provoking your wrath to this degree? Yes, indeed, they are worse and more hateful than demons, for what demon ever made himself the adversary of the divine or dared to blaspheme God's creation as the heretics do? Indeed, what do they claim? That it was not God who made heaven and earth or all the visible universe.¹⁰ And because they are truly blind and deaf, they do not understand the words of John the Theologian: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made, that was made...' [John 1.1-3]. In many places, the holy prophets, the apostles and other just men proclaim that God is the creator of everything visible and invisible. Why speak of the just? Ask anyone you like, a barbarian, someone ignorant, ask the devil himself, who is the creator of everything visible and invisible, and they will answer you, 'Why, my friend, are you so crassly ignorant? What can exist or be without the order of God?' Heretics, who showed you that God is not the author of this created world? Woe to your unbelief, for you are piling fire on your own heads.

As for the Lord's cross, here are the blasphemies they produce: 'How can we adore it? It was on it that the Jews crucified the son of God, and the cross is even more the enemy of God.' So they teach their followers to detest rather than to adore it, saying thus: 'If anyone killed the king's son with a cross of wood, would the wood be dear to the king? The same is true of the cross for God.' O, the devil's hatred of mankind! To what chasm of perdition has he not led them? Just as formerly the Jews read the prophecies but did not realize that they were teaching about the Lord's passion, and it was those who read the prophecies daily and every sabbath who became the murderers of Christ, thinking that they could put the Immortal One to death, so the heretics who read the words of the Lord and the apostles constantly do not understand what is said to them. Blessed Paul was right to give them the description 'those who are lost,' saying, 'the word of the cross is folly to those who are lost, but for us who are saved it is the power of God' [1 Cor. 1.18]... I could cite from other books proof that our Lord's cross is holy, but the heretics would not believe them...

Indeed, what Christian has not been enlightened by the Lord's cross? Who has not rejoiced to see crosses set up in high places, where once men sacrificed to demons, immolating their sons and daughters? Who has not saved himself from evil when confronted by any sort of trial by making the sign of the cross on his face or his heart? The Saviour spoke of his cross to the apostles before his crucifixion, saying, 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, so that whoever believes in Him may not perish, but have eternal life' [John 3.13-14]. Truly, my brothers, those who look lovingly on the Lord's cross will not perish. As we gaze on the cross with the eyes of the flesh, but with the eyes of the spirit contemplate Him who

is crucified there, we glorify Him and say, ‘Glory to you, Christ our God, who graciously willed to bring death by your cross to him who long ago brought death to our ancestor Adam in Paradise, and who have given us your cross for victory in our fight with the devil.’ We hope in this way to shut the mouth of the heretics God hates, who utter untruths against God, and to gain everlasting life. As for me, I will not cease denouncing godless heretics to ‘build up’ the Church of God, that is, the Christian faith, which they try to overturn.

Indeed, what do they say about holy communion?¹¹ ‘A divine command did not institute communion; the Eucharist is not really, as you claim, the body of Christ, but a simple food like all others. For it is not Christ who instituted the Mass, which is why we do not honour holy communion.’ Their blindness! Their hardness of heart! Tell me, godless heretic, what was the Lord talking about when He gave bread to the apostles and said, “Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you for the remission of sins”? And again, when He held the cup in His most pure hands and gave it to His disciples, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many’ [Matt. 26.26-8]. What was Paul talking about in his epistle to the Corinthians? [1 Cor. 11.2-9].

There it is, heretics, clearly proved — I have not spoken of myself, but in the words of holy scripture and the apostle — that the holy Eucharist is not ordinary food, as you think, but really the most pure body of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, just as earlier when He created the world, he said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light; ‘Let there be heaven,’ and there was heaven; ‘Let there be earth, and all it bears’ [Gen. 1.3, 8, 11], and in an instant all came into existence as the Holy Scripture says, so now by His power the Holy Spirit transforms this bread into the Lord’s body, this cup into His blood, just as the holy men who were the true witnesses of the mysteries of God have told us in scripture...

Tell us, who have shown you that these words do not apply to this consecrated bread and cup, as you heretics claim in your madness? In your deceits, you tell that they refer to the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, not to holy communion; by ‘body,’ you understand the four gospels and by ‘blood,’ the Acts of the Apostles.¹² As for us, let us ask them the question, “Tell us, you who are blind if you have common sense; when the Lord gave this bread and cup to his disciples and said, “This is my body, this is my blood” when He gave them this commandment, was He still on earth or had He ascended to heaven?” Even if they are blind, they have tongues to answer with, and they cannot say that the Lord had ascended to heaven when He said these words; it was during the night when He gave Himself up that He made all these arrangements; He sanctified them and entrusted them to the apostles, and in obedience to them the apostles transmitted them to us: we believe that it is the real body and blood of the Lord, not an image.

After the Lord ascended to heaven, the holy apostles wrote the four Gospels so that true believers might remember and be saved, as they told us. Matthew wrote eight years,¹³ Mark ten years,

Luke fifteen years and John thirty-two years after the Ascension. The Acts of the Apostles were written many years later; Luke the evangelist, who knew what Paul had said and done, wrote it down and transmitted it to the churches; to this day, the holy churches are happy to read them out loud, to do as the Lord said: 'No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light' [Luke 8.16]. So how can you, heretics, say that the words of Christ do not apply to holy communion but to the four gospels?'

Again, why do you blaspheme against the holy rules transmitted to us by the holy apostles and by the fathers inspired by God (I mean the office and other prayers used by good Christians)? How can you say, 'It is not the apostles who bequeathed the liturgy to us, or the communion, but John Chrysostom?' More than three hundred years elapsed from the incarnation of Christ to John Chrysostom; did the churches of God remain bereft of liturgy and communion for all those years? Did the apostle Peter not compose the office that the Romans still follow? And James, the Lord's brother, the first bishop, established by the Lord himself, did he not compose an office at Jerusalem, which is still sung to this day, as we have been told, at the Lord's tomb?¹⁴ Later, Basil the Great in Cappadocia gave us a liturgy, following the instructions that he had received from God. He regulated the communion, dividing it into three parts, as the Holy Spirit had bidden him. So, how can you say that communion and the religious office are not part of divine tradition?

You insult priests and the whole religious hierarchy by treating priests who are true believers as blind Pharisees, yapping at them like dogs following a mounted man; the eyes of your spirit are blind; when you read the epistles of the blessed Paul, you are incapable of realizing who has established priests, bishops and the rest of the clerical orders over all the world, but, as Paul says, 'Seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness' [Rom, 10.3].

Even if priests whose faith is sound lead idle lives, as you say when you condemn them, still they do not blaspheme the divinity as you do. All the same, they will have gained some hidden merit,¹⁵ and 'who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?' as the apostle says. [Rom. 14.1]. 'In a great house, there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and earthenware, and some for noble use, others for ignoble. If anyone purifies himself from what is ignoble, he will be a vessel for noble use' [2 Tim. 2.20-21]. So, if they were good for nothing, they would not be hallowed... The heretics who hear these words answer us, 'If you are sanctified, as you claim, why do you not live as you are bidden to? As Paul says in his epistle to Timothy, "Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and no lover of money. He must manage his own household well. Deacons likewise must be chaste, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, and have a good reputation. Let them be tested first; then if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve" [1 Tim. 5.2~4, 8-10]. Now we see that you are not like this; priests act quite otherwise. They get drunk, they commit robbery and have

other hidden vices, and nobody forbids them to do these evil deeds, despite the words of Paul, “As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all so that the rest may stand in fear” [1 Tim. 5.20]. Bishops, instead of preaching self-denial as we do, deny us their prayers but do not forbid their priests to sin.’

Let us answer them with this: ‘Heretics, do you not understand what Paul said on this subject in his letter to Timothy? “Never admit any charge against a presbyter except on the evidence of two or three witnesses” [1 Tim. 5.19]. The lewd and arrogant heretics have no shame but continue, ‘Even if their sin is in secret, yet still they live openly according to the flesh and not according to the spirit, as we do; for the works of the flesh, says Paul, are “fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like” [Gal. 9.19-21].’ Let us answer them, ‘Why do you raise yourselves so high above us, heretics? Do you not hear what the Lord said to you: “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted?” [Luke 18.14]...

Priests are honoured by God; listen, heretics, to what the Lord says about them to the apostles: “The priests sit on Moses’ seat, so practise and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do, for they preach but do not practise’ [Matt. 23.2-3]. Do you see, heretics, that you are commanded to hold priests in honour, even if they are wicked? If the Lord orders the apostles who are so great and so holy to obey those who sit on the seat of Moses, how much rather ought you and everyone to honour those who are seated on the seat of Christ? Just as Christ is far more venerable than Moses, so those who sit on His throne are far more venerable than those who sit on the seat of Moses. . .

For all, sin is less serious than heresy. Even Jews did not spit on anything but the Lord’s flesh, while heretics spit on His divinity, but this rebounds on their own face. So heretics are greater sinners than the very Jews who crucified Christ; they insulted His body, while the others insulted His divinity. In fact, the devil, who could not oppose divine holiness on his own, took them as his assistants, as once he did Judas at the Lord’s crucifixion. He incites them to blaspheme all the traditions of the Holy Church in his desire to destroy the rites of prayer that the holy apostles and Fathers have handed down to us. This can never be, as the Lord said: ‘It is on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell (that is to say, the teaching of heretics) shall not prevail against it’ [Matt. 16.18].

Indeed, which apostle or holy man taught you, you heretics, to spurn the law God gave to Moses? What falsehood have you found in the prophets to insult them and reject the books they wrote? How can you claim to love Christ when you reject what the holy prophets prophesied about Him? The prophets said nothing of themselves; they gave us their predictions as the Holy Spirit ordered them to. If you do not believe the words which God spoke once through the

mouths of the prophets, listen to what the holy apostles say about the prophets; if you do not believe the apostles either, you are still more unbelieving than the heathen themselves, more malevolent than the demons. Peter, the great leader of the apostles, cried, 'What God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets from of old' [Acts 3.18, 21]. Listen also to blessed Paul proclaim the same: 'And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints' [Eph. 4.11-12].

Do you see, heretics, that the prophets are holy and that the Holy Spirit has proclaimed everything to us through their lips?... What does Scripture say about David, from whose race Christ became man? 'I have found in David, the son of Jesse, a man after my heart, who will do all my will' [Acts 13.22]. Of the same David, Matthew writes at the beginning of his gospel: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" [Matt. 1.1]. The heretics make nothing of this David, who is so great and holy, and reject the words that the Holy Spirit uttered through his mouth. They do not accept Abraham, 'the friend of God' [James 2.23], Daniel, Azarias and his companions, or the other prophets whom even wild beasts feared, before whom fire shrank back. As for John the Forerunner, the dawn of the great Sun, they insult him and call him the precursor of the antichrist, the man whom the Lord Himself called greater than all the saints: "Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist" [Matt. 11.11]; the Lord Himself bowed His head before him to receive baptism at his hand. In truth, they are themselves the antichrists, according to the words of the evangelist John the Theologian, 'Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come' [1 John 2.18].

Surpassing all their evil, see this that the wretches commit; they do not honour the most glorious and pure mother of Our Lord and God Jesus Christ, **16** and utter madness against her. It is impossible to record in this book their words and their insults with regard to her whom the prophets foretold...

If the Lord is with her, as He always is, always without end, what do you heretics count on when you neglect such a path to salvation? We put our trust in you, blessed mother of God; be merciful to us now and on the dreadful day of judgement. It is you who appear most holy in all the world, visible and invisible. Truly blessed is the house of David in which you were reared: 'God is in the midst of you; you shall not be overturned, for the Most High has hallowed you his tabernacle.' You are the support of Christians, the protectress of sinners, the boast of those who live the life of virginity, the bulwark of our faith. Now then, blessed mother of God, gain from your Son by your prayers that we may be saved from all evil; it is through you that we have known the Son of God and that we have been found worthy to be partakers of His holy body and blood. When we see His image in an icon, carried in your arms, we sinners rejoice, and we bow low before it and kiss it with fervour in the hope that through your prayers, we may attain the life of heaven.

‘Cult paid to an image passes over to its original,’ as great Basil¹⁷ said. The heretics have heard the apostle Paul speaking about idols: ‘We ought not to think that the deity is like gold or silver made by the art of men’ [Acts 17.29], and because these wretches think that this applies to icons, they have made these words a pretext for not reverencing the icons when they are on their own. They visit churches and kiss the cross and the icons for fear of men, as some of them who have been converted to our true faith have told us, ‘We do all this for man’s sake, not from our heart: we keep our faith in secret.’ As for us, the people of true believers, when we see the Lord’s image painted on an icon, we lift our hands towards it, we sigh deeply, and turn the eyes of our spirit to heaven, to the Lord Himself, who is there with the Father and the Holy Spirit, we cry out: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, who revealed yourself on earth for our salvation, who were willing of your own free will that your hands should be nailed to the cross, who gave us your cross to put all our enemies to flight, have mercy on us, who put our trust in you.’ Then, when we see the icon of Mary, the holy mother of God, again, from the depths of our hearts, we cry out to her, ‘Most holy mother of God, do not forget us, us who are your people, for it is in you that we have our protection and sinners their support; thanks to you we hope to obtain the remission of our sins, etc.’ When we see the image of some saint, we say the same:

‘Saint of God’ — here we name him - ‘you who suffered for the Lord, you have influence with your master, pray for me, that your prayers may save me.’



The medieval Bogomil cemetery of Nea Chalkidona, near Thessaloniki. The Bogomils didn’t believe in the cult of the cross. Still, in their attempt to hide and protect their graves from the persecutions of the authorities, the official church and the Orthodox population, they used the cross, albeit with an antique and particular symbolical shape, which precedes Christianity, that of the solar cross as a direct reference to Manichean Gnosticism.

Do you see, heretics, how false your words are and full of deceit when you say, ‘Those who venerate icons are like the pagan Greeks’? As we venerate an icon, we do not prostrate ourselves in front of its paint or its wooden panel, but in front of him whose image is reproduced, him whose portrait is painted with the appearance he ought to have, whether young or old. Just as a woman with a good heart who loves her husband, if she sees in the house a tunic or a belt of his when he is away from her on a long journey, she takes it in her hands, kisses it, holds it to her eyes; it is not the bright colours of the garment that she loves, but she does it because it carries the name of the one she loves. So we too, we Christians, who love Christ, if we find some piece of clothing in which one of God's pious servants have been martyred, or a bone of his body or powder from his tomb, we think of them as most holy, we lay hold of it with awe and kiss it with love; it is not the dust or the bright-coloured cloth which we are venerating, but the saint himself, or rather Christ, whom he has served well, as the prophet David said: ‘I have held your friends in honour, my God.’

But, they say, we do not listen to David or the prophets, but only to the gospel, and we do not live in accordance with the law of Moses, but that of the apostles. Come then, listen, you heretics, if you have ears, while I prove to you that those who do not obey the Law and the prophets deny Christ himself. For what does the Lord say?: “Think not that I have come to destroy the Law and the prophets. I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them.” [Matt 5.17]... Indeed, what is so wrong and reprehensible that the heretics have seen in the Law and the prophets that they insult and reject them and claim that they cannot save us?...

They insult every law which is part of the tradition of God's Holy Church and honour their own teachings, muttering goodness knows what fables that they learn from their father, the devil. It is unwise even to denounce their absurd ideas in front of you — their words, as I have already said, defile everything under the heavens. All the same, I will tell you something, passing over the rest in silence: ‘for it is a shame even to speak of the things they do in secret’ [Eph. 5.12].

Many people do not understand what this heresy represents; they think that these people are suffering in the interest of justice and that they will receive some reward from God for the prisons and fetters they have suffered. Let them listen to what Paul says here: ‘An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules’ [2 Tim. 2.5]. How could they deserve any compassion, even if a host of them suffer, when they claim the devil as the creator of mankind and all the divine creation? And because of their great ignorance, some call him a fallen angel, others call him the ‘steward of iniquity.’¹⁸ These terms they use make men of good sense laugh, as their arguments are not consistent and fall to pieces like a scrap of rotten cloth; in their desire to surpass one another in ingenuity, each of them invents his own imagined name for his own father and teacher. They have conceived such veneration for him that they call him the creator of

God's works and think that the glory of God is the glory of the devil, despite God's words through the prophet, 'I will not give my glory to another' [Isa. 42.3].

The heretics have heard the lying devil say to Jesus: 'All these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me' [Matt. 4.9.]; they put their faith in this and think that he is the master of God's creation. Again, they hear the Lord say, 'The ruler of this world is judged' [John 16.11], and then, 'Now the ruler of the world is coming, and has no power over me' [John 14.30], and hearing these words, call the devil master and prince of God's creatures. But they should learn why he was called 'prince.' Before the Lord's crucifixion, when idols were multiplied all over the earth, and impure sacrifices were being offered everywhere, the devil exalted himself, and sin and death reigned with him; after the only Son of God did us the favour of destroying his power by His cross he was no longer called 'prince' or 'master,' but enemy and adversary; we see him trodden underfoot daily, not just by men, but also by women, the feebler sex, as those will know, who have read the life of the holy virgin Justina, of bishop Cyprian¹⁹ and those of the other saints of God. The devil is still called prince and father and master of those who do his will, brigands and the debauched, heretics and all those who obey him, not because God has given him power but because they have run to him of their own free will. In every heart, he sows evil thoughts, but he does not reap a harvest everywhere. If he does not have power over pigs, how much more does he not have power over men made by God's hand?

We hear many of our people ask — why does God let the devil attack men? These infantile remarks do not come from a healthy mind; it is for the sake of his brave men that God has allowed the devil to sow evil thoughts in the minds of men so that those who do God's will may be recognized, and those who do the will of the devil... As, my brothers, when a thought which inclines us to any sin assaults the heart of any one of us, let us take hold of the rod and staff of the Lord, I mean the cross of Christ, as we make it on our face and our hearts, and instantly that cowardly and shameless dog [the devil] will turn away from us; if he repeatedly tries to attack us, let us chase him off with the same sign of the cross.

As for the heretics, since they have made themselves aliens to the cross of Christ and have driven him far off from themselves, they allow themselves to be wholly led by the devil, as he wants. Just as those who fish with a hook cannot catch fish unless they put a worm on the hook, so heretics cloak their poison under hypocritical humility and fasts, and again they take the Gospel in their hands and, giving it an impious interpretation, they try to catch men this way and lead them to perdition; they think they can destroy all charity, all the Christian faith ... burning it up by their prayers, vainly and senselessly. For it is said: 'If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I have nothing' [1 Cor. 13.3].

If this is said of man, how much more is it not true of the Church of God, which teaches men not to love? And through their ruin, the holy Gospel suffers in their hands like 'A gold ring in a

swine's snout' [Prov. 11.22]; so sweet a food becomes deadly, through the poison they introduce into the soul of those who listen to their falsehoods. Just as a cup of honey becomes bitter if you add to it a single drop of vinegar, their deadly poison acts in the same way on those who listen to it, even if they think they are doing no evil. Such is the habit of the devil; he blinds the eyes and shrinks sin so that those who do evil think they are doing nothing wrong.

If a single claw traps a bird, it is bound to die; how much more ought heretics to die, who are trapped by so many different fingers! What words of scripture have they not twisted, what part of the divine ordering of the world have they not blasphemed? They have not just blasphemed the earth but have hurled their blasphemies at the heights, saying that it is by the devil's will that all exists: the sky, the sun, the stars, the air, mankind, the churches, the cross; all that belongs to God they ascribe to the devil; in short, everything that moves on the earth, whether it has a soul or not; they ascribe it to the devil.

When they hear the Lord in the gospel, tell the parable of the two sons [Luke. 15], they make Christ the elder son and the younger son, who has deceived his father, the devil. They themselves gave him the name Mammon;²⁰ they called him the creator and architect of things terrestrial. They say that it was he who bade men take wives and eat meat and drink wine; in short, they insult all we have and pass themselves off as inhabitants of heaven, while they term servants of Mammon men who marry and live in the world; they refuse all these things with repugnance, not for the sake of abstinence, as we do, because we do not think that they are impure. The Holy Spirit has prophesied about this, too, by the mouth of Paul, who says in his letter to Timothy: 'Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, through the pretensions of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving: for then it is consecrated by the word of God and by prayer' [1 Tim. 4.1-5].

Heretics, did you see these words of the Holy Spirit, declaring that legitimate marriage is pure, instituted by God, and that food and drink taken in moderation cannot condemn a man?...

What we have written here is not to desire or permit anyone to get drunk or to eat to excess but to shut the mouths of the odious heretics who totally forbid us to touch meat or wine, which they treat as impure. We are well aware that a drunkard is a being hateful to God and man; holy scripture is full of attacks on those who drink to excess; a drunkard makes fools laugh, and wise men weep, for he loses the intelligence and reason which are God's gifts to him, and of his own free will turns himself into a brute beast instead of a man. The next day, his head and his stomach hurt, and his muscles shake, so that from it comes two sorts of harmful consequences, sins of the soul and illnesses of the body. So wine taken in moderation, as the body needs it, is a good thing, but taken in excess, it overwhelms a man in great evils.

I hear one of these heretics saying, 'Who has made you teacher among us?' Let them remember the scripture: 'Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above' [James 1.17]. What I am saying is not to boast or set myself up, God forbid - I know that pride could even cast the angels out of heaven — but to refute these heretics...

That is why, faithful people of Christ, we priests, who are your unworthy teachers, beg you in the words of the apostle, 'Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world' [1 John 4.1].

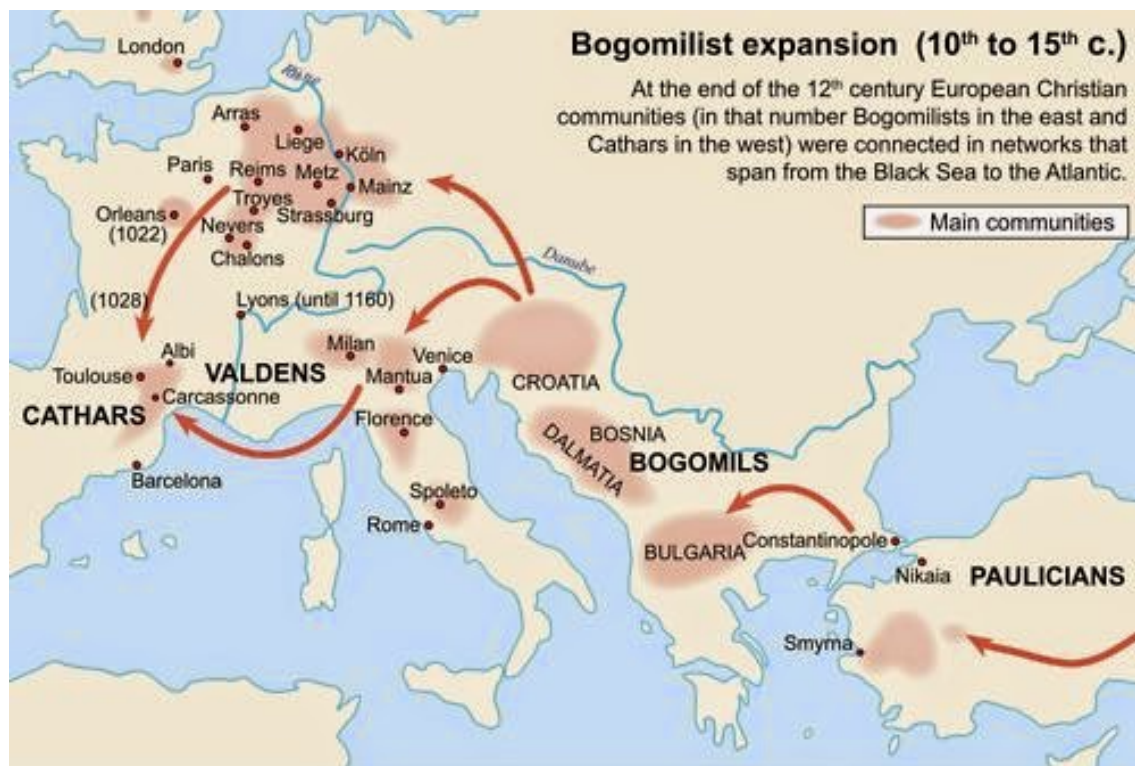
If you trust in these men or welcome them with love in your houses, or do something for them that gives joy, look, I have warned you in advance; you are condemning yourself with them to eternal torment. So, faithful people of Christ, even if you see a heretic drive away demons, give sight to the blind, raise the dead, do not have faith in him. The Lord says, 'They will do prodigies and miracles so as to deceive even the elect if it is possible.' If it is your father or mother or brother or son who falls into these errors, and after a first and second remonstrance he does not listen to you, separate yourself from him, and have him in aversion, for it is said: 'As for a man who is factious, after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is perverted and sinful; he is self-condemned' [Titus 3.10-11].

Do you see, my brethren, the deadly blows of the devil? - they also reject holy baptism and loathe little children who are baptized. If they see a young child, they shrink from it as if from some evil smell; they spit and cover their faces when they themselves are filth to men and angels. Even if they want, lyingly, to maintain that they are Christians, as is their habit, do not believe them; they are liars, like their father, the devil. Now, how can they claim to call themselves Christians when they have no priests to baptize when they do not make the sign of the cross, they do not write down the priests' prayers and do not honour priests? If it ever happens that a priest joins their belief, it is because he has turned his back on all our faith; if he keeps it, it is for fear of the earthly masters, but his heart and mind are wandering far away from the law the Lord gave to the holy churches.

Little children are pure, without sin; let us listen again to what the Lord said of them, addressing the apostles: 'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them: for to such belong the kingdom of heaven' [Matt. 19.14]. And again: 'Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' [Matt. 18.3]. The heretics are so inflated with pride, even higher than the famous Pharisees, that they go so far as to claim that the little children whom the Lord declared are pure are not worthy to be brought to them but turn away from them in horror, inventing new names without cease, in their great ignorance. They call them children of Mammon, intending to say, children of the devil...

As for holy baptism, I am not constrained to speak to you of it in this writing; everyone knows, even if he has a mind deranged, that it is God who instituted baptism and transmitted it to us. He said, ‘Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you’ [Matt. 28 19~20]. What the holy apostles have set up and what they have taught with great effort, this it is that the heretics have set themselves to destroy...

How, indeed, are they not the enemies of God and man who do not believe in the Lord’s miracles? Because they call the devil the creator, they do not admit that Christ performed any miracles. Although they hear the evangelists proclaim out loud the Lord’s miracles, they ‘twist them to their own destruction’ [2 Peter 2.16], saying: ‘Christ did not restore any blind person's sight, he cured no cripple, he did not raise the dead; these are only parables. The evangelists present sins which were cured as if they were diseases.’ Nor do they believe in the crowds in the desert fed on five loaves; they say, ‘What was there was not bread, but the gospels of the four evangelists, and the fifth was the Acts of the Apostles.’ In short, they have ‘twisted the sense of everything to their own destruction.’



Their prayers swarm with thousands of errors. They pray, shutting themselves in their houses four times a day and four times a night,²¹ and they open the five doors²² which should be kept closed. As they pray, they say, ‘Our Father, who art in heaven,’ but even this condemns them because, in their words, they call the creator of heaven and earth Father when they make his

creation the creation of the devil. As they pray, they do not make the sign of the cross on their face.

We ask them this question. If, as your madness claims, the devil created this visible world, why do you eat bread and drink water since all this is the devil's work? Why do you wear our clothes? You condemn us at the same time as the one who made them, but without your volition, it is God to whom you referred; God is the creator of us and of all things visible and invisible. The devil sows your thoughts and words; when he could find no place for himself under heaven, he made his nest in your hearts and there, like a bird, hatched out your thoughts and your doctrines. Indeed, who taught you to fast, make prostrations, and give yourselves to manual work on the day of the Lord's resurrection [Sunday]? You say that men have instituted these rules; it is not written in the gospels. You do not observe any of the feasts of the Lord or any commemoration of the holy martyrs or holy fathers.

See all the tangles of their delusion, the signs of perdition. I omit the other abominations they teach, which are a web of various errors, the sort you might expect from them, as they are not in their right mind. If they had their reason, they would not claim that the most-holy mother of God sinned; if they had their reason, they would not call the devil the creator of heaven and earth; if they had their reason, they would not call the holy cross the enemy of God; if they had any sense, they would not blaspheme against the holy institutions of the Church, which have been handed down to them; if they had any sense, they would not label as deceits the miracles which take place over the holy relics, but would listen to the Lord, saying, 'He who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and greater works than these' [John 14.12]. When the heretics refuse to give glory to any saint, they are also decrying the miracles of God.

Let a man ask them, 'Is this what you do and say?' — then they deny it and swear on oath, 'We are not such as you believe.' They deny their practices and prayers so forcefully that you would think there was no harm in them: 'Everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed' [John 3.20]. This is a trick they teach their followers, to whom they explain, 'If our prayers and our works came to be known among men, then all our labour would have been wasted.' They try to conceal themselves behind the words of scripture, which the Lord uses: 'When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so that their fasting may be known among men. But when you pray, go into your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And in praying, do not heap up empty words, but Our Father who art in heaven.' For, he says, the hypocrites 'love to stand and pray at street corners' [Matt. 6.5, 16.6- 7.9]. The heretics twist all this that they read; they claim that the 'streetcorners' are the churches, 'excess of words' means the offices and the other prayers which take place in churches. Woe to them, in the Lord's words in which it is written: 'Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the man by whom the temptation comes!' ...

I would like to report to you some other opinions they hold, which they make use of to entrap ignorant souls: ‘You ought not to weary yourself with earthly labours: since the Lord said: “Do not be anxious about what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, or what you shall put on; for the pagans seek all these things” [Matt. 6.25, 31-2]. That is why some of them go about in idleness and are unwilling to employ their hands with any task; they go from house to house and eat the goods of others, those of the men they have deceived. As the Lord says, they shall be the more condemned. Let us listen to the apostle Paul:... ‘If anyone does not work, let him not eat’ [2 Thess. 3.10]. The heretics, then, incur a double condemnation, both for spreading an alternative doctrine and for being the new apostles and precursors of the antichrist, preparing for people to welcome the son of perdition.

They teach their followers not to obey their masters; they scorn the rich; they hate the Tsars; they ridicule their superiors; they reproach the boyars; they believe that God looks in horror on those who labour for the Tsar and advise every serf not to work for his master. On this point, we shall recall to the Christ-loving faithful the words and teachings of the apostles and prophets to confound the shamelessness of the heretics. The wisdom of God says, ‘emperors and lords have been instituted by God’ [Proverbs 8.15-18]. Listen to it: ‘It is by me that kings reign and rulers decree what is just; by me, princes rule and nobles govern the earth. I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me. Riches and honour are with me...’

Much has been written on the same subject as the other sacred writers, but there is nothing there to support the heretics with their contradictory absurdities. As for the words: ‘Do not be anxious about what you shall eat or what you shall drink’ [Matt. 6.25], the Lord did not say this to forbid manual labour but because he does not want us to waste care on terrestrial goods rather than to concern ourselves with our souls. ‘The soul,’ he says, ‘is worth more than food, and the body more than clothing.’ We are not forbidden to betake ourselves in manual labour, but as we work with our hands, we should occupy our souls by considering divine matters. If God had ordered men not to work, plants would grow grain and woods grapes; as things are, when God bids men work and share with the needy the product of their toils, let the lazy and those who blaspheme shut their mouth...

I would like to tell you another opinion of the heretics which the devil, the enemy of men, uses to catch them in a trap. They hear it said by James, the Lord’s brother: “Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” [James 5.16], but do not realize that these words are said to priests. James says, ‘Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven’ [James 5.14-15]. The heretics practise confession to one another and loose sins when they are themselves caught in the toils of the devils. It is not just the

men who do this, but the women as well, which is worthy of condemnation. For the apostle says, 'I permit no woman to teach or have authority over men: she is to keep silent' [1 Tim. 2.12].

But heretics blaspheme everything they do not know, as the blessed apostle Jude said: 'But these men revile whatever they do not understand, and by those things they know by instinct, as irrational animals do, they are destroyed. Woe to them! For they walk in the way of Cain, and abandon themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error, and perish in Korah's rebellion. These are blemishes on your love feast, as they boldly carouse together, looking after themselves; waterless clouds, wandering stars, for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved forever' [Jude 10-13].

For mankind's sake, the holy apostles have written this about heretics even more: 'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the people of the renewal' [1 Peter 2.9], as the chief of the apostles says. You should all honour priests and approach those who are good and learned, 'for there are some who long ago were designed for this condemnation, ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness' [Jude 4]. John says, 'If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting, for he who greets him shares his wicked work' [2 John 10-11]. 'For,' he says, 'many deceivers have gone out into the world; look to yourselves, that you may not lose what you have worked for' [2 John 7-8].

If you recognize anyone who shares the heretical faith, and if anyone among you is competent to instruct him, teach him and set him back on the right path: 'Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin' [James 4.17]. If they do not listen to you and do not accept this saving teaching, shake the very dust off your feet and say, 'Your blood be upon your own heads.' When you have marked the heretic in this way, separate yourself from him, soul and body. 'Let him be to you as a pagan and a Gentile,' as the Lord said [Matt. 18.17]. And know this: that on the day of judgement, it shall be better for Sodom and Gomorrah than for this man. So do not give this teaching to dogs who refuse to obey, and do not scatter your pearls before swine. But if they listen to these holy words and repent and turn away from the deceptions of the heretics, welcome them with enthusiasm, taking care to be certain that their repentance is real and not pretended, for they are very cunning and hide their thoughts in the depths of their heart. If, as I say, their conversion is real, and they truly confess with tears their deceiving delusions, lead them affectionately in the right path, in the knowledge that in the next world we shall receive a great reward... _ Listen to the words of John the evangelist [actually James 5.19-20]: 'My brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his ways will cover a multitude of sins.'

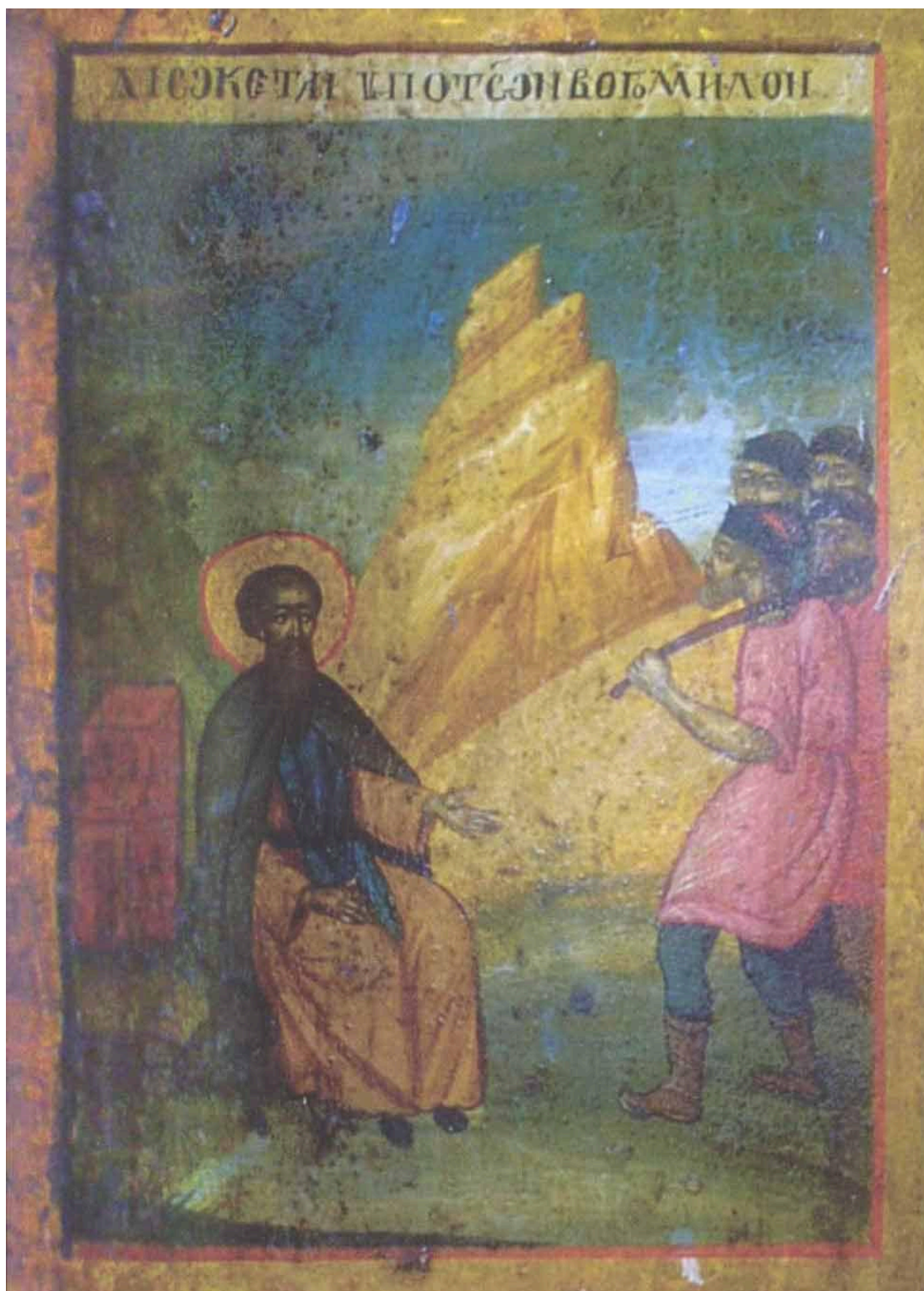


Nemanja's Assembly against the Bogomils in Raška. Fresco from the church of St. Achilles in Arilje, circa 1290. Grand Prefect Stefan Nemanja, who presides over the Assembly, is at the center of the composition. To his left and right are high church dignitaries, one of whom, most likely, is the then Bishop of Raška, Jephthymius, who occupied an important place at the council. At the bottom left are the representatives of the Orthodox clergy (with a halo, a symbol of holiness, around their heads), and at the bottom right are the "half-believers," or Bogomils, who were condemned as heretics at the council.

Source: "The discourse of the priest Cosmas against Bogomils (after 972)," *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c. 650-c. 1450*, Manchester University Press 1998.

NOTES:

- 1 The list of earlier heretics resembles those found in other anti-heretical texts.
- 2 927-69. The phrase 'good Christian' is normally used of the dead.
- 3 This name is probably the Bulgarian translation of the Greek name Theophilus.
- 4 Cf. the description of Cathars as 'good Christians'.
- 5 An alternative reading gives: 'as if they were in heaven'.
- 6 For the nightly prayers of Bogomils, see EZ [25], c. 19.
- 7 Similar allegations of hostility to the cross are made against Paulicians in PS [7], c. 27, and Bogomils in EZ [25], c. 14.
- 8 Cf EZ [25], c. 11.
- 9 For hostility to relics and the cult of the saints, see EZ [25], c. 12.
- 10 For Bogomil views on creation, see EP [19] and EZ [25], c. 7.
- 11 For rejection of the Eucharist by Paulicians, see PS [7], c. 40; by Bogomils, see EP [19], EZ [25], c. 17.
- 12 This allegorical interpretation of the words instituting the Eucharist resembles that given by Paulicians; see PS [7], c. 40.
- 13 These traditional dates for the composition of the gospels are found in many medieval MSS; see von Soden, *Die Schriften des neuen Testaments* 1, pp. 297-9, 323-7.
- 14 For pilgrimages to Jerusalem at this period, see EP [19].
- 15 An alternative text reads: 'even if they have committed secret sins.'
- 16 For Paulician and Bogomil's rejection of the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary, see PS [7], cc. 22, 39; EP [19]; EZ [25], cc. 8, 22.
- 17 St Basil the Great (330-79).
- 18 Compare EZ [25], c. 6.
- 19 The existence of the popular edifying legend of the conversion and martyrdom of the sorcerer Cyprian of Antioch and the beautiful young Christian Justina is recorded by the year 379 when Gregory of Nazianzen included allusions to it in his sermon in praise of the (historical) Cyprian of Carthage. See Delehay, 'Cyprian d'Antioche et Cyprian de Carthage'.
- 20 In the account of ps.-Psellus [34], the devil is the elder and Christ the younger son. See also EZ [25], c. 6.
- 21 EZ [25], c. 19: 'seven times a day and five times a night'.
- 22 Of the senses.



St. Naum and Bogomil.



THE BYZANTINE LANDS 1: EUROPE



THE BYZANTINE LANDS 2: THE ASIATIC LANDS